

Rowland B. Reeve

To Preserve an Island

Kaho`olawe is the smallest of the eight major islands in the Hawaiian chain. For most of the last 50 years, the island has been used as a military bombing target. In 1980, following an extensive archeological survey, the entire island of Kaho`olawe was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1994, control of the island was transferred from the United States Navy to the state of Hawai`i which will hold it in trust until the formation and recognition of a sovereign Hawaiian nation.

After nearly 50 years of isolation and abuse, the island of Kaho`olawe has once again been returned to the people of Hawai`i.

When we speak of protecting and managing cultural properties, we are normally thinking of the preservation of a single structure or a group of related structures, such as a historic building or an archeological site. Occasionally, we have in mind a small village or a sacred area covering a number of acres. Seldom, if ever, do we contemplate the management of a cultural property the size of an island. Yet, that is just the task presently confronting the Kaho`olawe Island Reserve Commission.

Established in 1993, just prior to the transfer of the island of Kaho`olawe from the United States Navy to the State of Hawai`i, the Kaho`olawe Island Reserve Commission has as its mission the protection, restoration, and preservation of the entire island, its cultural sites and natural environment. When the state took over management of Kaho`olawe, it declared the island a natural and cultural reserve "to be used solely and exclusively for the preservation and practice of all rights customarily and traditionally exercised by Native Hawaiians for cultural, spiritual, and subsistence purposes; preservation and protection of its archeological, historical, and environmental resources; rehabilitation, revegetation, habi-

Evidence of the military's tenure on Kaho`olawe still litter the landscape.



tat restoration, and preservation; and education." All commercial activity has been banned from the island. It is envisioned that the island may someday become "a learning center where traditional Hawaiian cultural customs, beliefs, and practices can be freely practiced and can flourish for future generations." The Commission, consisting of seven members: two from the Protect Kaho`olawe `Ohana (the grass-roots organization which for 20 years has worked to stop military use of the island and return it to the people of Hawai`i), one from the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, one from the Hawaiian community, one from the City and County of Maui, and one from the State Department of Land and Natural Resources, was set up to carry out this mandate and to plan for the island's future. Its job will not be an easy one, for the events of Kaho`olawe's varied, and at times violent, past have severely scarred the island.

Originally home to a small but thriving Hawaiian community, Kaho`olawe has, since western contact, been used as a penal colony, a ranch, and a military bombing target. Each of these activities has left its mark on the island's landscape. Of



A small shrine stands near the adze quarry of Pu'umoiwi, the second largest such quarry in the Hawaiian Islands.



massive shoulders block the northeasterly trades, cutting Kaho'olawe off from the life-giving rains that green the windward slopes of the other Hawaiian islands. As a result, Kaho'olawe has always been a relatively dry island. Most of the rainfall that reaches it comes in the form of heavy *kona* (southern) storms, which occur during the winter months, or from the occasional light evening mists that drift over from Haleakalā to

immediate concern to the Reserve Commission is the legacy left by almost 50 years of military use. From December 8, 1941, when the island was taken over under martial law, until October 22, 1990, Kaho'olawe served as a target range and training area for the U.S. Navy. Kaho'olawe was bombed from the sea, land, and air. Records show that almost every piece of ordnance developed during that period, with the exception of nuclear and chemical weapons, was tested on the island. A goodly portion of what was dropped on Kaho'olawe failed to explode, and remained, undetonated, on or just below the ground surface. Despite past efforts to clear some of this debris, many parts of the island remain littered with shrapnel and unexploded shells.

As part of its agreement to transfer control of the island to the state, the Navy agreed to undertake a major cleanup effort. That effort has now begun. Over the next eight years a private contractor employed by the Navy will remove all of the surface ordnance and debris from the island, and clear subsurface ordnance from specific areas designated by the Reserve Commission. Numerous archeologists and cultural specialists will be involved in the clean-up effort to help insure that none of the island's traditional sites are damaged during the clean-up. This is a daunting task, as evidence of Kaho'olawe's early inhabitants can be found almost everywhere on the island. Following the clean-up, the Reserve Commission will have the responsibility of caring for these cultural sites, protecting them from the destructive elements of man and nature.

The management of Kaho'olawe not only entails the preservation of its cultural sites, but also the restoration of its natural environment. The island lies in the lee of the great volcanic dome of Haleakalā on neighboring Maui, whose

settle on the island's upper slopes. In earlier times, these upper slopes were covered in dryland forest: an open, savanna-like environment of scattered trees and shrubs underlain by a thick carpet of *pili* grass. The island's lower slopes were primarily grass and shrublands. Rainfall in the upland interior was just sufficient to support fields of dryland crops such as sweet potato, yam, and sugar cane, with which Kaho'olawe's early inhabitants supplemented their diet of seafoods gathered from the rich waters surrounding the island.



Introduced goats have caused major damage to the island's fragile native ecosystem.

A contemporary lele (offering platform) stands on the heights above Hakioawa valley. Kaho'olawe may become a model for both the preservation of historic sites and their continued cultural use.



Not long after western contact, possibly as early as the 1790s, goats were introduced onto Kaho'olawe. By 1850, visitors to the island were remarking on the large herds that roamed wild over the landscape, inflicting major damage to the native ecosystem. By 1879, the goats had stripped the vegetation from the upper slopes, opening the land to the erosional forces of wind and water. As one visitor noted, "the upper plains [are] entirely denuded of top soil... the whole interior plain has been so swept by wind and floods, that nothing but a very hard red grit is left." Though some efforts were made in the 1920s and 1930s to control the goat population, they were never fully eradicated. For much of the Navy's tenure on the island, the goats were allowed to roam free and virtually unmolested. They multiplied rapidly, causing further damage. The bombing of the island only served to increase the erosion begun by the goats. Huge gullies cut into the flanks of the island, and the sea around it ran red with soil runoff. It took a law suit brought by the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana to force the Navy to address the problems of environmental degradation. Eventually, in 1992, the last of the goats were eradicated. The Reserve Commission, in cooperation with the 'Ohana, has already begun revegetation efforts. These attempts at environmental restoration are designed to help stop the ongoing erosion and repair the centuries of damage done to the island's fragile ecosystem.

Erosion has also had a damaging effect on a number of cultural sites. Six to twelve feet of rich topsoil has been stripped from the uplands, leaving only a barren, red "hardpan." Buried within this soil were the remnants of temporary campsites occupied by the islands early inhabitant while they were tending their upland fields. The remains

of these campsites—fire-cracked rock, flaked stones, and sea shells brought up from the coast as food—now lie scattered across the hardpan. These sites have been literally excavated by the elements. How to protect these sites during the process of environmental restoration is a problem now being studied by the Reserve Commission.

Along the coast, where erosion has been relatively minimal,

the cultural sites are much better preserved. Though the bombing has damaged a number of sites, the military's occupation of the island has, ironically, helped to preserve much of what might otherwise have been lost. By isolating Kaho'olawe, the Navy unwittingly saved the island from the triple threats of agricultural, residential, and resort development, which have had such a devastating effect on the cultural heritage of the other Hawaiian Islands. Kaho'olawe remains one of the few places where one can still encounter a traditional Hawaiian landscape. In the valley of Hakioawa, for instance, one can see the remnants of an entire village, its house sites, canoe sheds, and shrines. Since the late 1970s, the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana has conducted traditional Hawaiian religious ceremonies at Hakioawa, and some of these shrines have been rededicated. The Reserve Commission has the delicate task of balancing preservation with continued cultural use.

In planning for the future, the Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Commission has drawn from the past, modeling its management strategy on traditional Hawaiian land management practices. These practices, developed over centuries of interaction with the land, will help the Reserve Commission cope with the problems and challenges facing it in the years ahead.

Rowland B. Reeve is a writer and photographer in Hawai'i and has recently published Kaho'olawe: Na Leo o Kanaloa.

Photos by the author.

Heritage Preservation in the Pacific Island States

PREMO (Preservation by the Museums of the Pacific Island States) 1994–1998 is a program for heritage preservation in 22 Pacific Island states. In this unique project, the professional staff from museums and cultural centers have established new directions for heritage preservation. Since the founding meeting, professionals in the region have insisted that collections preservation must always be linked to the preservation of living cultures. Conservation must also be linked at all times to the development of the entire museum, where funds are almost always inadequate.

What does this mean in results?

The most moving example was the closing session of a week-long seminar held in Noumea, New Caledonia, 1994. Elders from the local Kanak community held an Aé ceremony on the museum grounds. Some 200 spectators participated as chiefs called out their lineage and musicians played flutes that had not been heard in



A kava drinking ceremony on the occasion of the founding of PIMA (Pacific Island Museum Association) at the UNESCO Pacific Museum director's Meeting tour of the Fiji Museum.

decades, followed by dance music on traditional instruments. It was the first time in living memory that such an event had been held in the capital.

There were also many other activities linked to museum and community development. To date, PREMO partners have:

- established the Pepperleaf Vine, a fax network between all museums and cultural centers in the 22 isolated nations in the region;
- published three issues of the first newsletter exclusively for and by regional heritage professionals;
- developed a database of 225 heritage professionals and institutions in the region, including a file of potential course instructors;
- with UNESCO, established a committee for a Pacific Islands Museum Association, which will be the first in the region;
- joined with UNESCO Pacific Regional Office to cooperate in museum development in the Pacific;
- included sessions on collections conservation, recording living cultures, tourism, preservation of traditional crafts and income from crafts, in a seminar on "Preservation of Heritage Records";
- with UNESCO, launched a children's poster competition (Our Culture, Our Heritage) in 15 nations;
- held an intensive one-week course for heritage professionals from the Pacific Islands, "Preserving the Pacific Traditions of Wood and Tapa" (organized by Cook Islands National Museum and ICCROM as an event for PREMO).

For more information, please contact: Neal Putt, PREMO/ICCROM, Via di San Michele, 1300153, Rome, ITALY, email <NP@iccrom.org>

—Neal Putt is the Coordinator for Preventative Conservation at ICCROM in Rome.

Preserving Pacific Heritage Sites

PREMO will be holding a seminar on Preserving Pacific Heritage Sites in Palikir, Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). The seminar, which is being funded by FSM, UNESCO Pacific Office, the University of Canberra, and the World Monuments Fund, will be a two-week long course aimed at enabling heritage professionals in the Pacific to take a leading role in heritage site preservation in their home states.

The course will begin with an excursion to Nan Madol, a highly significant site near the city of Palikir, dating to 1,000 A.D. There will then be an introduction to the process and guidelines of heritage site manage-

ment, and a group exercise to Nan Madol as a case study. Participants will learn the principles of identifying heritage sites and conducting community consultation during the identification process. They will also learn how to establish significance and draft statements of significance. The course will include sections on legislation and administration to achieve World Heritage designation, and work to develop strategies for World Heritage designations. Participants will prepare site conservation plans, and work in groups to prepare management plans. Other course topics include site archeology, record systems, site collections and museums, conservation works and maintenance, and interpretation and visitor management.